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ABSTRACT

A manual for use in training French and Spanish language examiners at the Foreign Service Institute is presented here. After a discussion of the history of the language proficiency test and of the testing procedure and evaluation techniques, the following topics are covered: (1) language proficiency ratings based on the absolute criterion of the command of an educated native speaker of the language; (2) self appraisal of speaking proficiency; (3) the nature of the test; (4) the assignment of "plus" ratings; (5) the language proficiency check list and instructions for its use; (6) instructions for using the numerical rating procedure; (7) a weighting table for use with the proficiency check list to determine ratings; (8) suggested topics for an oral test; (9) questions for examiners; (10) suggestions and questions for testing candidates who appear to be above the elementary level; (11) an explanatory section in French for French examiners and one in Spanish for Spanish examiners; (12) grammatical criteria in French and in Spanish that indicate to some degree the control of the language; (13) a general description of the accompanying tapes; (14) examples of examiners' comments and ratings for all levels of both French and Spanish tests; and (15) suggestions for selection of reading materials. (AMH)

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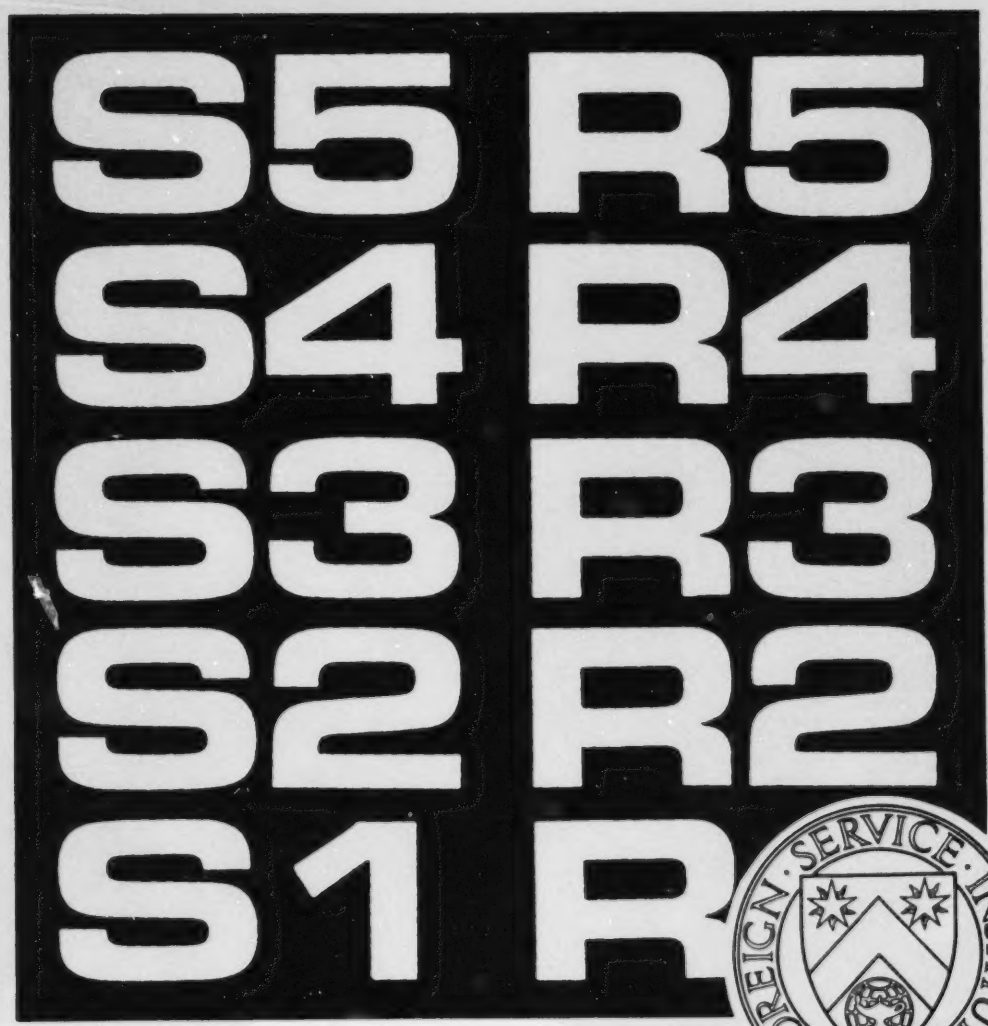
TESTING KIT

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES



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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

Edited by
MARIANNE LEHR ADAMS

PREFACE

This manual and the accompanying set of tape recordings comprise a kit for use in training French and Spanish language examiners at the Foreign Service Institute. The system for scoring proficiency is the 0 to 5 scale for speaking and reading, sometimes called the FSI proficiency scale. The definitions of levels have proved broad enough to apply to all languages, yet specific enough to arbitrate decisions in particular instances.

The reading selections are memoranda to the staff from Claudia P. Wilds, head of the Language Testing Unit from 1958 to 1968.

When Ms. Wilds joined the staff of the School of Language Studies, the oral interview and sight translation methods of determining language proficiency were already in practice, but further training of examiners was clearly needed. The memoranda in this volume were written to provide guidance on applying the definitions of levels to the measurement of oral proficiency, relating the performance of examinees to the absolute standard of native ability.

The voices of the examiners on the tapes are those of Claude-Marie Coates, Monique Cossard, Elisabeth DeMaynadier, Catherine Hanna, Francine Haughey, Robert Salazar, Brian Simblist and Marie-Francoise Swanner in French and C. Cleland Harris, Chairman of the Department of Romance Languages, Vicente Arbelaez, Susana Framinan, Jorge Krichmar, Marianne Lehr, Isabel Lowery, Jose Molina, Leonor Paine, Harry Rosser, Patricio Solis, Blanca Spencer, Jack Ulsh and Stephen Zappala in Spanish.

The commentaries on the French tests were prepared mainly by Mme. Hanna and Mme. Swanner with lesser contributions from Mr. Simblist. With the exception of a few contributions by Harry Rosser and Don Bryan, the commentaries on the Spanish tests were done by Dr. Harris. The French chapter was edited by Alain Mornu and Mme. Cossard. The Spanish chapter by Mr. Zappala. The tapes were edited by Jose Ramirez of the FSI language laboratory. Maryko Deemer of the Publications Office produced the camera ready copy.

James R. Frith

James R. Frith, Dean
School of Language Studies
Foreign Service Institute

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The Measurement of Speaking[1] and Reading Proficiency in a Foreign Language

With an ever-increasing demand for multi-lingual Americans to fill business, government, and academic positions both at home and abroad, a need has developed for a meaningful and efficient way to describe proficiency in a foreign language. Such terms as "good," "fluent," or "bi-lingual," whether applied by teachers or supervisors to the competence of their students or employees or used as self-appraisal designations, have proved to be vague, unmeasurable, and open to many interpretations.

Since 1956 the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State has been rating Government employees on a simple numerical scale which succinctly describes speaking and reading proficiency in a foreign language. This scale has become so widely known and well understood that statements like, "The Consul has an S-2 R-3 in Thai," or "That position requires someone with S-4 R-4 in French" are immediately intelligible within meaningful limits of accuracy to everyone concerned with personnel assignments in the numerous Government agencies who use the FSI testing facilities.

The usefulness of the system is based on careful and detailed definition in both linguistic and functional terms of each point on the scale.

This paper is principally concerned with the description of the testing procedures and evaluation techniques whereby the rating system is currently applied at the Foreign Service Institute.

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[1] Readers may wish to see also a paper by Ms. Wilds entitled The Oral Interview Test which is included in Testing Language Proficiency, Center for Applied Linguistics 1975, and which draws on materials in pp.1-6 of this manual.

BACKGROUND

Prior to 1952 there was no inventory of the language skills of Foreign Service Officers and, indeed, no device for assessing such skills. In that year, however, a new awareness of the need for such information led to preliminary descriptions of levels of proficiency and experimental rating procedures. By 1956 the present rating system and testing methods had been developed to a practicable degree.

Both the scope and the restrictions of the testing situation provided problems and requirements previously unknown in language testing. The range of these unique features is indicated below:

1) The need to assess both speaking and reading proficiency within a half-hour to an hour. The requirement was imposed principally by the limited time available in the examinee's crowded schedule.

2) The need to measure the complete range of language competence, from the skill acquired in 100 hours of training or a month of experience abroad to the native facility of someone who received his entire education through the foreign language.

3) A population consisting of all the kinds of Americans serving the United States overseas: diplomats (from career ambassadors to visa officers), secretaries, agricultural specialists, Peace Corps volunteers, soldiers, tax experts, and many others. They may have learned their language skills at home or on the job or through formal training, in any combination and to any degree. Generally no biographical information is available before the test.

4) The necessity for a rating system applicable to any language, easy to interpret by examiners, examinees, and supervisors, and immediately useful in decisions about assignments, promotions, and job requirements.

5) The need for unquestioned face validity and reputation of high reliability: those using the test results to make decisions about the careers of others are themselves examinees and must have faith in the accuracy of their own ratings.

With these restrictions there was, from the beginning, very little choice in the kind of test that could be given. A structured interview custom-built to fit each examinee's experience and capabilities in the language promised to use the time allowed for the test with maximum efficiency. A rating scale, with units gross enough to ensure reasonable reliability, was developed on the basis of both linguistic and functional analyses. The scale is included as Appendix A.

Although both the testing procedure and the rating scale were first put to use more or less in their present form in 1956, a real measure of their effectiveness began in the summer of 1958, when the Department of State instituted a mandatory testing program. This lead was quickly followed by the U.S. Information Agency, the Agency for International Development, and then a number of other agencies; and the Language Testing Unit now administers over 3000 tests a year in approximately 40 languages. As a consequence, both testing techniques and rating criteria have been refined and elaborated to the point where they can be quickly and reliably learned by qualified linguists, language teachers, and native speakers.

Whenever possible the testing team consists of a native speaker of the language being tested and a linguistic scientist

thoroughly familiar with the language. Ideally the native speaker is an experienced teacher of English speakers, has reasonably well-informed interest in current events throughout the world, and has a warm, friendly, and tactful curiosity about all kinds of people. The linguist need not speak the language fluently, but should have very high aural comprehension and acute sensitivity to phonological, structural, and lexical errors. The more all these attributes are shared by both examiners, the smoother and more reliable the test.

It is sometimes the case that the only native speaker available has none of the desired characteristics. If this is true, the linguist will need to alter his own role to a much more active one, as will be seen in the description of speaking test procedure below. If the linguist does not meet the normal requirements, he is forced to depend heavily on the native speaker and on his own experience in testing other languages.

SPEAKING TEST: PROCEDURE

The usual speaking test is conducted by the native speaker, with the linguist observing and taking notes. To the greatest extent possible the interview appears as relaxed, normal conversation in which the linguist is a mostly silent but interested participant.

The test begins with simple social formulae: introductions, comments on the weather, questions like:

"Have you just come back from overseas?"
"Is this the first time you've taken a test here?"
"Did we keep you waiting long?"

The examinee's success in responding to these opening utterances will determine the course of the rest of the test. If he fails to understand some of them, even with repetition and rephrasing, or does not answer easily, at least a preliminary ceiling is put on the level of questions to be asked. He will be asked as simply as possible to talk about himself, his family, and his work; he may be asked to give street directions, to play a role (e.g., renting a house), to act as interpreter for the linguist on a tourist level. Rarely, he may handle these kinds of problems well enough to be led on to discussions of current events or of detailed aspects of his job. Usually he is clearly pegged at some point below the S-2.

The examinee who copes adequately with the preliminaries generally is led into natural conversation on autobiographical and professional topics. The experienced interviewer will simultaneously attempt to elicit the grammatical features that need to be checked. As the questions increase in complexity and detail, the examinee's limitations in vocabulary and structure normally become apparent quite rapidly. (A well-trained team usually can narrow the examinee's grade to one of two ratings within the first five or ten minutes; they spend the rest of the interview collecting data to verify their preliminary conclusions and make a final decision.)

If the examinee successfully avoids certain grammatical features, or if the opportunity for him to use them does not arise, or if his comprehension or fluency is difficult to assess, the examiners may use an interpreting situation appropriate to the examinee's apparent level of proficiency. In languages in which testing is relatively infrequent or in which either or both examiners have difficulty in spontaneous role-playing, a set of bi-lingual dialogs is often prepared and written down for this

purpose. If the situation is brief and plausible and the interchange yields a sufficient amount of linguistic information, this technique is a valuable supplement.

A third element of the speaking test, again an optional one, involves instructions or messages which are written in English, given to the examinee to be conveyed to the native speaker, (e.g., "Tell your landlord that the ceiling in the living room is cracked and leaking and the sofa and rug are ruined.") This kind of task is particularly useful for examinees who are highly proficient on more formal topics or who indicate a linguistic self-confidence that needs careful exploration.

In all aspects of the interview an attempt is made to probe the examinee's functional competence in the language and to make him aware of both his capacities and limitations.

The speaking test ends when both examiners are satisfied that they have pinpointed the appropriate S-rating, usually after half to two-thirds of the allotted time for the whole test.

READING TEST: PROCEDURE

The short time available to measure reading ability forces a system which is necessarily less reliable than one would like. Nevertheless, correlations of .70 to .80 with longer, objectively scored tests have been reassuring.

In each language, materials have been prepared corresponding to every level of the R-rating scale. Where the number of tests warrant it, the plus-levels are also represented and there are readings on varied topics at each level.

The linguist selects a reading at a level equal to or a little below the speaking level of the examinee. Normally the

examinee studies the passage (100-200 words long) and then translates all of it or parts of it. If his translation is satisfactory, he is given a passage at the next higher level; if it is weak, another passage at the same level; and if it is very poor, a passage at the next lower level. The process continues until the examiners are satisfied that they know the highest level he can handle adequately.

Except at the R-1 level, at which highly simplified materials are used, the readings are taken from books, magazines, and newspapers written for the native speaker. They are graded according to complexity of syntax and difficulty of vocabulary. Constant use of the same materials enables the examiners to determine the words and structures which may be appropriately or inappropriately difficult for the level to which the reading is assigned. If the reading is suitable overall to one level, the excessively obscure words may be supplied without penalty to the examinee who does not know them. If the passage is mixed in level, the linguist may assign only the parts of it that fit the level he is testing out.

While materials are changed fairly frequently, new passages are always checked against old ones before they are finally ranked.

Except for fairly high frequency words, vocabulary is not weighted as heavily as insight into structure because most examinees can be expected to have ready access to a dictionary.

It should be emphasized that the elegance of the translation is irrelevant. Most examinees are unaccustomed to translating, especially oral translating, and cannot be expected to render a precise English version quickly and easily. What is sought is the ability to show an accurate understanding of the material in

a reasonable amount of time. It is assumed that the examinee will be asked at times to convey the contents of such material to someone who can read only English.

SPEAKING TEST: EVALUATION

As the examinee studies his first reading selection, the examiners independently fill out the "Checklist of Performance Factors" with which they are provided. This checklist, reproduced below, records a profile of the examinee's relative strengths and weaknesses, but was designed principally to force each examiner to consider the five elements involved.

1.	ACCENT	foreign	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	native
2.	GRAMMAR	inaccurate	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	accurate
3.	VOCABULARY	inadequate	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	adequate
4.	FLUENCY	uneven	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	even
5.	COMPREHENSION	incomplete	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	complete

This checklist was derived from an earlier one in which "Accent" was divided into "Pronunciation" and "Intonation," "Grammar" into "Morphology" and "Syntax," and "Vocabulary" into two scales with polar terms of completeness and accuracy. The simplified version reduced problems that the earlier one caused for examiners in languages of East Asia and made the procedure generally less formidable and more acceptable to all examiners.

A weighted scoring system for the checklist has been derived from a multiple correlation with the overall S-rating assigned (R = .95). Partly because the sample was based mainly on tests in Indo-European languages, partly because of a widespread initial suspicion of statistics among the staff, use of the scoring system has never been made compulsory or even urged, though the examiners are required to complete the checklist.

The result has been that most examiners assign the S-rating on the basis of experienced judgment and compute the checklist score only in cases of doubt or disagreement. Nevertheless, the occasional verifications of the checklist profiles seem to keep examiners in all languages in line with each other (in the sense that an S-2 in Japanese will have much the same profile as an S-2 in Swahili); and those who once distrusted the system now have faith in it.

To the trained examiner each blank on each scale indicates a quite specific pattern of behavior. The first two scales, Accent and Grammar, obviously indicate features that can be described most concretely for each language. The last three refer to features that are easy to equate from language to language but difficult to describe except in functional terms, and probably dangerous to measure from so small a sample of speech on a scale more refined than these six-point ones.

The checklist does not apply to S-0's or S-5's, and the fact that the nine ratings from S-0+ to S-4+ must be reflected in the five six-point scales prevents an unconsidered column of checks to indicate a single level. The examiners are allowed to make checks in between blanks if they want to, and those who give many tests often do.

When the mandatory testing program began in 1958, ratings were given on the basis of one-sentence definitions of each level. These definitions were written to be broad enough to cover every language but were so unspecific that standards varied from language to language and examinees often felt they were underrated. As the number of tests and types of examinees increased, it was possible to set more and more concrete criteria. For S-ratings there are now three principal sources of clarification: the official amplified definitions, which describe both

the linguistic and functional characteristics of each level; a chart called "Factors in Speaking Proficiency" (Appendix B) which specifies the minimum criteria at each level for the five checklist factors, and is therefore primarily linguistic in focus; and a questionnaire called "Self-Appraisal of Speaking Proficiency" (Appendix C). This last is based almost entirely on functional skills and is designed not only to permit someone to appraise himself accurately but to give new or would-be examiners insight into the range and depth of mastery demanded at each level. These three documents provide sufficient information to enable even the most inexperienced tester (if he meets the basic qualifications) to determine an S-rating within a point of the rating given by trained examiners after he has observed three or four tests, and within half a point (that is, a "plus") after he has observed ten or twelve.

The actual determination of the S-rating is handled differently from team to team. In some cases the linguist and native speaker vote on paper, in others one suggests a grade and the other agrees or disagrees and gives his reasons for dissent. In some a preliminary vote is taken as the examinee studies material for the reading test, and disagreement leads to further oral testing until accord is reached. Since the linguist plays a supervisory role, it is important that he see to it that the native speaker contributes fully to the final decision. If a half-point discrepancy cannot be resolved by discussion or averaging of the computed scores from the checklist, the general rule followed is that the lower rating is given. (The rationale for this rule is that the rating is a promise of performance made by FSI to assignment officers and future supervisors. The consequences of overrating are more serious than the consequences of underrating, however disappointing the marginal decision may be to the examinee himself.)

READING TEST: EVALUATION

Because of the nature of the reading test, evaluation is virtually simultaneous with the translation. Once the over-difficult items in a selection are removed from consideration, it is generally true that three major vocabulary mistakes and one basic structural error are enough to make a translation totally unsatisfactory. Fewer mistakes than that will put the decision up to the linguist's discretion. Usually at least one reading at each level must be translated with only a single vocabulary error or none to be acceptable.

Because the linguist always has a native or near-native command of English and the native speaker rarely does, the linguist's decision on the R-rating is always final, though he should meet questions or objections from the native speaker if they exist. Normally there is no real problem.

VALIDITY

Aside from recently-developed tests (not yet standardized) in some European languages, there are no measures currently available beside those of FSI which test the full range of speaking and reading ability from beginner to native competence. The measures that exist are oriented toward the college student or literary specialist rather than the adult conducting his business or profession in a foreign language. As a consequence, the only criterion available to us has been the acceptability of the S- and R-rating definitions and their application to actual performance for both the examinees and the end-users of test results.

By this criterion it seems safe to say that the tests are valid. Almost all the Government agencies using FSI testing

facilities have established language policies which depend heavily on test scores for assignment to specific positions, for promotion, and for incentive awards. The examiners are made continuously aware that test ratings are commitments on the examinee's linguistic capacity to perform certain functions, and it is obvious that these commitments are being met with sufficient consistency to enable many different groups to rely on them without question.

The examinees themselves have generally accepted both procedure and rating system as valid measures of their competence. The complaints about results are now limited almost entirely to those who disregard basic grammatical features of the language or are unaware of them. Those who are both familiar with the rating criteria and aware of their own limitations, now a very great majority, not only concede the accuracy of their scores but have become increasingly competent at self-appraisal.

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ABSOLUTE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY RATINGS

The rating scales described below have been developed by the Foreign Service Institute to provide a meaningful method of characterizing the language skills of foreign service personnel of the Department of State and of other Government agencies. Unlike academic grades, which measure achievement in mastering the content of a prescribed course, the S-rating for speaking proficiency and the R-rating for reading proficiency are based on the absolute criterion of the command of an educated native speaker of the language.

The definition of each proficiency level has been worded so as to be applicable to every language; obviously the amount of time and training required to reach a certain level will vary widely from language to language, as will the specific linguistic features. Nevertheless, a person with S-3's in both French and Chinese, for example, would have approximately equal linguistic competence in the two languages.

The scales are intended to apply principally to government personnel engaged in international affairs, especially of a diplomatic, political, economic and cultural nature. For this reason heavy stress is laid at the upper levels on accuracy of structure and precision of vocabulary sufficient to be both acceptable and effective in dealings with the educated citizen of the foreign country.

As currently used, all the ratings except the S-5 and R-5 may be modified by a plus (+), indicating that proficiency substantially exceeds the minimum requirements for the level involved but falls short of those for the next higher level.

DEFINITIONS OF ABSOLUTE RATINGS

ELEMENTARY PROFICIENCY

S-1 Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements. Can ask and answer questions on topics very familiar to him; within the scope of his very limited language experience can understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition or paraphrase; speaking vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs; errors in pronunciation and grammar are frequent, but can be

understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak his language; while topics which are "very familiar" and elementary needs vary considerably from individual to individual, any person at the S-1 level should be able to order a simple meal, ask for shelter or lodging, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time.

R-1 Can read simplest connected written material, authentic or especially prepared for testing. In a form equivalent to usual printing or typescript, can read either representations of familiar verbal exchanges or simple language containing only the highest frequency grammatical patterns and vocabulary items. Texts may include personal and place names, street signs, shop designations and office designations.

LIMITED WORKING PROFICIENCY

S-2 Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility most social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information; can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties; can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e. topics which require no specialized knowledge) and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to express himself simply with some circumlocutions; accent, though often quite faulty, is intelligible; can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

R-2 Can read simple authentic written material in a form equivalent to usual printing or typescript on subjects within a familiar context. Can read uncomplicated but authentic prose on familiar subjects such as news items describing frequently occurring events, simple biographic information, social notices, formatted business letters and simple technical material written for the general reader. The prose is predominantly in familiar sentence patterns. Test candidates may need occasional prompting on a low frequency items.

FULL WORKING PROFICIENCY

S-3 Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Can discuss particular

interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease; comprehension is quite complete for a normal rate of speech; vocabulary is broad enough that he rarely has to grope for a word; accent may be obviously foreign; control of grammar good; errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

R-3 Able to read standard newspaper items addressed to the general reader, routine correspondence, reports and technical material in his special field. Can grasp the essentials of articles of the above types without using a dictionary; for accurate understanding moderately frequent use of a dictionary is required. Has occasional difficulty with unusually complex structures and low-frequency idioms.

PROFESSIONAL PROFICIENCY

S-4. Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Can understand and participate in any conversation within the range of his experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary; would rarely be taken for a native speaker, but can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations; errors of pronunciation and grammar quite rare; can handle informal interpreting from and into the language.

R-4 Able to read all styles and forms of the language pertinent to professional needs. With occasional use of a dictionary can read moderately difficult prose readily in any area directed to the general reader, and all materials in his special field including official and professional documents and correspondence; can read reasonably legible handwriting without difficulty.

NATIVE OR BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY

S-5 Speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker. Has complete fluency in the language such that his speech on all levels is fully accepted by educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references.

R-5 Reading proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native. Can read extremely difficult and abstract prose, as well as highly colloquial writings and the classic literary forms of the language. With varying degrees of difficulty can read all normal kinds of handwritten documents.

FACTORS IN SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

	S-1	S-2
Pronunciation	Often unintelligible	Usually foreign but rarely unintelligible
Grammar	Accuracy limited to set expressions; almost no control of syntax; often conveys wrong information	Fair control of most basic syntactic patterns; conveys meaning accurately in simple sentences most of the time
Vocabulary	Adequate only for survival, travel, and basic courtesy needs	Adequate for simple social conversation and routine job needs
Fluency	Except for memorized expressions, every utterance requires enormous, obvious effort	Usually hesitant; often forced to silence by limitations of grammar and vocabulary
Comprehension	May require much repetition, slow rate of speech; understands only very simple, short familiar utterances	In general understands non-technical speech directed to him, but sometimes misinterprets or needs utterances re-worded. Usually cannot follow conversation between native speakers

S-3	S-4	S-5
Sometimes foreign but always intelligible		Native
Good control of most basic syntactic patterns; always conveys meaning accurately in reasonably complex sentences	Makes only occasional errors, and these show no pattern of deficiency	Control equal to that of an educated native speaker
Adequate for participation in all general conversation and for professional discussions in a special field	Professional and general vocabulary broad and precise, appropriate to every occasion	Equal to vocabulary of an educated native speaker
Rarely hesitant; always able to sustain conversation through circumlocutions	Speech on all professional matters as apparently effortless as in English; always easy to listen to	Speech at least as fluent and effortless as in English on all occasions
Understands most of what is said to him; can follow speeches, clear radio broadcasts, and most conversation between native speakers, but not in great detail	Can understand all educated speech in any moderately clear context; occasionally baffled by colloquialisms and regional-	Equal to that of the native speaker

SELF-APPRAISAL OF SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

(All answers must be YES to achieve at least the level of proficiency listed on the left, except for four items at the S-3 level.)

		YES	NO
S-0+	Can you use a minimum of thirty words in appropriate contexts? (i.e., not just count or recite the days of the week).	☐	☐
S-1	Can you tell someone how to get from here to the nearest hotel, restaurant, or post office?	☐	☐
	Can you ask and tell the time of day, day of the week, date?	☐	☐
	Can you order a simple meal?	☐	☐
	Can you negotiate for a hotel room or a taxi ride at a just price?	☐	☐
	Can you buy a needed item of clothing or a bus or train ticket?	☐	☐
	Can you understand and respond correctly to form questions about your nationality, marital status, occupation, date and place of birth, etc.?	☐	☐
	Can you make a social introduction and use appropriate leave-taking expressions?	☐	☐
	Can you use the language well enough to assist someone who does not know the language in coping with the situations or problems covered by the S-1 range?	☐	☐
S-1+	Can you meet all S-1 requirements and at least three of the S-2 requirements listed below?	☐	☐

		YES	NO
S-2	Can you describe your present or most recent job or activity in some detail?	☐	☐
	Can you give detailed information about your family, your house, the weather today?	☐	☐
	Can you take and give simple messages over the telephone?	☐	☐
	Can you hire an employee, or arrange for special services (taking care of details such as salary, qualifications, hours, specific duties)?	☐	☐
	Can you give a brief autobiography and tell of immediate plans and hopes?	☐	☐
	Can you describe the geography of the United States or a familiar location?	☐	☐
	Can you describe the basic structure of the U.S. Government or of the U.S. educational system?	☐	☐
	Can you describe the purpose or function of the organization you represent?	☐	☐
	Do you feel confident that you understand what native speakers want to tell you on topics like those mentioned above and that they understand you (linguistically) at least 80% of the time?	☐	☐
	Can you use the language well enough to assist someone else who does not know the language in coping with the situations or problems covered by the S-2 range?	☐	☐
S-2+	Can you meet all S-2 requirements and at least three of these S-3 requirements?	☐	☐

		YES	NO
S-3	(Answers should be No) Are there grammatical features of the language which you try to avoid?	☐	☐
	Do you sometimes find yourself in the middle of a sentence you cannot finish because of linguistic limitations (grammar or vocabulary)?	☐	☐
	Do you find it difficult to follow and contribute to a conversation among native speakers who try to include you in their talk?	☐	☐
	Are you afraid that you will misunderstand information given to you over the telephone?	☐	☐
	(Answers should be YES) Can you speak to a group of educated native speakers on a professional subject and be sure you are communicating what you want to, without obviously amusing or irritating them linguistically?	☐	☐
	Can you listen, take notes, and summarize accurately a speech or an informal discussion on your area of special interests, heard on the radio or over a public address system?	☐	☐
	Can you (on a social occasion) defend U.S. Attitudes toward culture, race relations, or foreign aid from attack by an anti-American student or politician?	☐	☐
	Can you cope with such trying linguistic situations as broken-down plumbing, an undeserved traffic ticket, a serious social or diplomatic blunder made by you or a colleague?	☐	☐
	Can you follow connected discourse on a non-technical subject, e.g., a panel discussion on the status of women?	☐	☐
	Can you serve as an informal interpreter on subjects in the S-3 range?	☐	☐

		YES	NO
S-3	Do you feel that you have a professional command (rather than just a practical one) of the language?	☐	☐
S-3+	Can you meet all S-3 requirements and at least three of these S-4 requirements?	☐	☐
S-4	In professional discussions, is your vocabulary always extensive and precise enough to enable you to convey your exact meaning?	☐	☐
	Are you able to alter your speech deliberately, depending upon whether you are talking to university professors, close friends, employees, etc.?	☐	☐
	Can you serve as an informal interpreter for a U.S. senator or cabinet official on all diplomatic and social functions?	☐	☐
	Do you practically never make a grammatical mistake?	☐	☐
	Do you think you can carry out any job assignment as effectively in the language as in English?	☐	☐
S-4+	In discussions on all subjects, is your vocabulary always extensive and precise enough to enable you to convey your exact meaning?	☐	☐
S-5	Do native speakers react to you as they do to each other?	☐	☐
	Do you sometimes feel more at home in the language than in English?	☐	☐

		YES	NO
S-5	Can you do mental arithmetic in the language without slowing down?	☐	☐
	Is your vocabulary at least as extensive and precise as in English?	☐	☐
	Do you consider yourself a native speaker of the language?	☐	☐

FSI LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS

NATURE OF THE TEST

A test normally lasts half an hour; the time is evenly divided between a speaking test and a reading test. The examiners are a scientific linguist and an instructor who is a native speaker of the language involved.

The Speaking Test primarily consists of a conversation with the native speaker on a variety of topics, both social and professional. It may also comprise imaginary situations (such as renting an apartment) and interpreting problems.

The Reading Test requires oral translation into English of passages of varying levels of difficulty. In some languages the examinee is asked to read the passages aloud before translating; in others he simply studies them first.

BASES FOR RATING

Speaking. The examiners consider five main aspects of performance, here listed in order of their importance: control of grammatical structure, completeness of comprehension, breadth and precision of vocabulary, fluency (or effortlessness of speech), and accuracy of pronunciation and intonation.

Reading. While an elegant translation makes an excellent impression, the examiners are most interested in a close translation into decent English which shows the examinee's accurate, detailed understanding of the material of the structure exemplified.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EXAMINEES

1. Answer questions as fully as possible; help us to get the largest sample of your speech that we can. We do not want brief, concise answers; we infinitely prefer loquacity to profundity.

2. On the other hand, try to speak accurately; don't sacrifice grammar for speed.

3. Don't be a perfectionist in translation if it takes you a long time to think of just the right word. If you can show by paraphrase that you clearly understand the meaning, you will be given credit. Make intelligent guesses if you like.

ASSIGNMENT OF + RATINGS

At the request of a number of linguists and instructors, I have attempted to formulate criteria for assignment of the + ratings; that is, those which fall between those ratings for which we have official definitions. These criteria, given below, are not to be considered as official definitions, but as guidelines to help you decide those awkward cases that do not fall neatly into any defined category.

S-1+ Exceeds S-1 primarily in vocabulary, and is thus able to meet more complex travel and courtesy requirements. Normally his grammar is so weak that he cannot cope with social conversation because he frequently says things he does not intend to say (e.g., he may regularly confuse person, number, and tense in verbs). Pronunciation and comprehension are generally poor. Fluency may vary, but even quite voluble speech cannot compensate for all the other serious weaknesses.

S-2+ Exceeds S-2 primarily in fluency and in either grammar or vocabulary. Blatant deficiencies in one of these latter factors or general weaknesses in both usually prevent assignment of an S-3 rating. If a candidate is an S-3+ in vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, and if his grammatical errors do not interfere with understanding, he should be awarded an S-3, <u>not</u> an S-2+.

S-3+ Exceeds an S-3 primarily in vocabulary and in fluency or grammar. The kind of hesitancy which indicates uncertainty or effort in speech will normally prevent assignment of an S-4, though the candidate's way of

speaking his native language should be checked in doubtful cases. Frequent grammatical errors must also limit the rating to an S-3+, no matter how excellent the pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

S-4+ Should be considered as just short of an S-5. Examiners should always be prepared to justify the awarding of an S-4+ rather than an S-5 by citing specific weaknesses. Reminder: native-born and educated Americans can conceivably attain S-5. Performance in the test, not biographical information given, is what determines assignment of a rating.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON FSI ORAL TESTING PROCEDURE

The S-rating is a measure, not of what the examinee "knows" in a passive sense, but rather of what he can get done through the language and how respectably. The most important criterion in determination of a rating is therefore the range of situations that an examinee can be expected to handle efficiently in the language. He must be rewarded for the success with which he makes use of what he knows, the skill he shows in circumlocution and evasion of uncontrolled structures, as well as for whatever precise, easy control of vocabulary and grammar he may display.

A test given under a rating procedure which is as non-mechanical and as flexible as FSI's has two unquestionable characteristics:

1) Content validity, in that it bases the measure of conversational ability on an actual demonstration of it.
2) Consistency of format from examiner to examiner and from language to language.

Speaking proficiency must be rated on the basis of extended speech in a natural context, with the verbal tasks assigned clearly pertinent to living and working abroad. Thus, for example, role-playing is pertinent with the examinee telling a real estate agent what kind of a house he wants to rent, seeking information from a visa applicant or explaining a U.S. policy position. On the other hand, substantive questions about literature, for example, or multiple choice written tests on grammar or vocabulary would have no place in determining an S-rating.

While examiners have always been allowed considerable independent judgment on the appropriate content of a test, it is essential that they agree on the specific features of speaking performance for which an examinee is rewarded or penalized. Especially in languages in which there are several examiners no examiner should be known for making unique demands (e.g. translation of poetry, use of regionalisms, etc.). Listed below are permissible techniques for eliciting information about speaking proficiency aside from the autobiographical conversation that is a part of every test. (News of other effective devices is very welcome.)

Pronunciation

No special attention needs to be given to this feature; all necessary information occurs in conversation.

Grammar

Elicit as many features as possible through natural conversation. Use of a checklist of grammar points will enable you to keep track of features which are controlled or uncontrolled and those not yet elicited.

Try to elicit all other grammatical features through role playing (e.g. test imperatives by getting something repaired or test question patterns by asking about transportation costs and schedules) or interpreter situations in which you require rather precise translation.

Playing games with the language like classroom drills and out-of-context translations from English should be techniques used only as a last resort, since they are artificial and lack spontaneity.

Vocabulary

At the lower end of the scale (S-2 and below) the examinee's limits of practical and professional vocabulary are easily established if the testers make a point of going beyond casual conversation to specific tasks related to the definitions (e.g. buying a bus ticket, hiring a maid, describing symptoms of illness to a doctor).

At the upper levels professional vocabulary is most easily elicited in conversation, general vocabulary through detailed problem solving (having a kitchen remodeled, describing repairs to be made on a car) and descriptions or definitions of everyday objects or behavior (describing a man's shoe, the rules of a game, the way to drive on snow and ice, the way to wrap a package for mailing).

It is important to remember that many, if not most, educated native speakers are not language-conscious and may not have in their active vocabulary words and expressions that a language specialist would take for granted, especially when asked for them out of context in English.

An examinee must be judged on his ability to express himself with ease and exactness rather than his talent for producing equivalents for English phrases. This means that circumlocutions are satisfactory substitutes for the 'mot juste.' (Passive vocabulary should be rated on the comprehension scale.)

Fluency

No special procedures are needed to measure fluency, but it is necessary to challenge an examinee through an S-3 level question if he seems to answer an S-2 level question comfortably.

It is easy to over-rate fluency on responses to simple questions. (Contrariwise, a slow response to a very difficult question should be appraised in the light of the effort a native speaker would have to make in his answer).

The main requirement for assessing fluency is providing the opportunity for the examinee to reply to several questions with answers of some length.

Comprehension

This feature is the one least adequately tested in the usual FSI test. If the native speaker has no special talent for asking questions with elaborate syntax and low-frequency vocabulary, a purely conversational test may make no more demand for comprehension from an S-5 than from an S-2.

While it is permissible to play tapes of short news broadcasts or radio dialogues to an examinee, it is frequently impossible or at least difficult to do so, either for lack of time or lack of a tape recorder. It may be wise to have brief newspaper clippings of various levels of difficulty for the native speaker to read aloud, with questions in English or the target language that primarily test comprehension of the difficult parts. (Testing of memory must be avoided.)

At the lower levels the examinee may be given instructions or information on which he must act; in fact at all levels the interpreting situation, if well-planned provides the surest check of comprehension.

Proverbial and idiomatic expressions understood by all educated native speakers (like "sour grapes" or "the pot calling the kettle black" in English) are legitimate items for an S-4

or better to be tested on, but knowledge of any particular proverb, idiom or vocabulary item is not a determining factor at any level. Regionalisms, obsolescent colloquialisms, or very low frequency words should be avoided.

Sparing use of abrupt changes of subject is helpful in testing comprehension without contextual clues. It is, however, a device which probably should not be used more than two or three times in a test; more frequent use may give the impression of incoherence.

FSI

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY CHECK LIST - TESTING UNIT

NAME _____ DATE _____

AGENCY _____ TIME _____

LANGUAGE _____

1.	ACCENT	foreign	__: __	__: __	__: __	native
2.	GRAMMAR	inaccurate	__. __	__: __	__: __	accurate
3.	VOCABULARY	inadequate	__: __	__: __	__: __	adequate
4.	FLUENCY	uneven	__: __	__: __	__: __	even
5.	COMPREHENSION	incomplete	__: __	__: __	__: __	complete

Absolute Rating: S-_____ R-_____

EXAMINER _____

INTERVIEWER _____

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE USE OF THE CHECK LIST

The purpose of the Check List is to provide a record of your evaluation of certain aspects of an individual's spoken language proficiency.

On the Check List you will find listed a series of Factors: Accent, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension. You are to rate the individual's performance by placing a check-mark on the scale beside each factor.

We will use the factor "Accent" as an example of how to use the scales.

If you feel that an individual's accent is very closely related to one end of the scale (i.e. his accent is extremely foreign, or extremely native), place a check-mark as follows:

foreign X : ___ ___ : ___ ___ : ___ native

or

foreign ___ : ___ ___ : ___ ___ : X native

If you feel that his accent is only slightly related to one end of the scale or the other (i.e. is quite foreign, or quite native), place your check-mark as follows:

foreign ___ : X ___ : ___ ___ : ___ native

or

foreign ___ : ___ ___ : ___ X : ___ native

If you feel that his accent is only slightly related to one end of the scale as opposed to the other (i.e. is more foreign than native, or more native than foreign) then place your check-mark as follows:

foreign ___: ___ _X_: ___ ___: ___ native

or

foreign ___: ___ ___: _X_ ___: ___ native

As an aid to accuracy and uniformity in rating, each of the factors is explained below:

1. ACCENT

   Consider pronunciation of individual sounds (consonants and vowels), as well as pitch and stress.

2. GRAMMAR

   Consider individual words and arrangements of words for grammatical accuracy.

3. VOCABULARY

   Consider adequacy of vocabulary (both sufficiency and accuracy) for the topics discussed.

4. FLUENCY

   Consider general smoothness or evenness of performance.

5. COMPREHENSION

   Consider both completeness and speed of understanding.

These factors are not necessarily inter-related; therefore you should not expect that an individual will necessarily receive the same rating on all the factors.

Consider each factor separately and in the order listed.

Numerical Rating Procedure

Instructions: For all of the five language areas (Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension), choose the Proficiency Descriptions--from 1 to 6-- which best represent the competence of the student. Then, in the Weighting Table, find the number corresponding to each of the five descriptions* and add all five numbers. Then determine the Conversion Table the rating level within which the total score falls. Please bear in mind that this numerical procedure is intended only to supplement the official verbal descriptions and should not be used by itself to determine a rating.

Proficiency Descriptions

Accent

1. Pronunciation frequently unintelligible.
2. Frequent gross errors and a very heavy accent make understanding difficult, require frequent repetition.
3. "Foreign accent" requires concentrated listening, and mispronunciations lead to occasional misunderstanding and apparent errors in grammar or vocabulary.
4. Marked "foreign accent" and occasional mispronunciations which do not interfere with understanding.
5. No conspicuous mispronunciations, but would not be taken for a native speaker
6. Native pronunciation, with no trace of "foreign accent."

*After some practice with this procedure, you may in some cases want to give a score that is "in-between" two of the descriptions. For example, if you feel the student's competence in Grammar is about midway between description 3 ("Frequent errors showing..." and description 4 ("Occasional errors showing..." you might give a weighted score of 21 for Grammar, rather than 18 or 24.

Grammar

1. Grammar almost entirely inaccurate except in stock phrases.
2. Constant errors showing control of very few major patterns and frequently preventing communication.
3. Frequent errors showing some major patterns uncontrolled and causing occasional irritation and misunderstanding.
4. Occasional errors showing imperfect control of some patterns but no weakness that causes misunderstanding.
5. Few errors, with no patterns of failure.
6. No more than two errors during the interview.

Vocabulary

1. Vocabulary inadequate for even the simplest conversation.
2. Vocabulary limited to basic personal and survival areas (time, food, transportation, family, etc.)
3. Choice of words sometimes inaccurate, limitations of vocabulary prevent discussion of some common professional and social topics.
4. Professional vocabulary adequate to discuss special interests; general vocabulary permits discussion of any non-technical subject with some circumlocutions.
5. Professional vocabulary broad and precise; general vocabulary adequate to cope with complex practical problems and varied social situations.
6. Vocabulary apparently as accurate and extensive as that of an educated native speaker.

Fluency

1. Speech is so halting and fragmentary that conversation is virtually impossible.
2. Speech is very slow and uneven except for short or routine sentences.

3. Speech is frequently hesitant and jerky; sentences may be left uncompleted.
4. Speech is occasionally hesitant, with some unevenness caused by rephrasing and groping for words.
5. Speech is effortless and smooth, but perceptibly non-native in speech and evenness.
6. Speech on all professional and general topics as effortless and smooth as a native speaker's.

Comprehension

1. Understands too little for the simplest type of conversation.
2. Understands only slow, very simple speech on common social and touristic topics; requires constant repetition and rephrasing.
3. Understands careful, somewhat simplified speech directed to him, with considerable repetition and rephrasing.
4. Understands quite well normal educated speech directed to him, but requires occasional repetition or rephrasing.
5. Understands everything in normal educated conversation except for very colloquial or low-frequency items, or exceptionally rapid or slurred speech.
6. Understands everything in both formal and colloquial speech to be expected of an educated native speaker.

WEIGHTING TABLE

Instructions for Use of the Check List to Determine S-Ratings

	1	2	3	4	5	6	(A)
Accent	0	1	2	2	3	4	
Grammar	6	12	18	24	30	36	
Vocabulary	4	8	12	16	20	24	
Fluency	2	4	6	8	10	12	
Comprehension	4	8	12	15	19	23	
					Total		

Procedure: Place in Column (A) the credits to be given for each scale on the Check List. For example, a check mark in position 3 on the "Accent" scale is given a credit of 2. Add the credits to find the total score. The final S-rating is to be equated with the total score by the following table.

Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating
16-25	S-0+	43-52	S-2	73-82	S-3+
26-32	S-1	53-62	S-2+	83-92	S-4
33-42	S-1+	63-72	S-3	93-99	S-4+

If the total scores by different examiners yield different S-ratings, an average of the total scores should be used to determine the final rating.

Suggested Topics For An Oral Test

Introductions and Greetings

Sample Opening Questions:
- Have you been waiting long?
- How did you get to FSI?
- Have you been in this building before?
- Did you have difficulty finding this office?

Topics useful for all levels:

- Training and experience with the language
- Most recent assignment abroad
  - Type of work and responsibilities
  - Problems on the job
  - Problems of the country, its government, economy, etc.
  - Living conditions, travel, recreation
- Earlier assignments (as above)
- Next assignment
- People and events in the news (descriptions, not opinions)

Topics for S-0+ to S-2+	Topics for S-2 to S-4	Topics for S-3+ to S-5
Family and House	Explanation of American terms and culture (e.g. "red tape," "Buy American" act, U.S. system of education)	International politics
Date and Time		Cultural differences
Weather		Dictation of letter on assigned topic
Giving Directions	Reasons for career choice	Translation from English
Situations:	Visa interview or other job situations	
Getting a hotel room		
Buying a train ticket		
Changing money		
Taking a taxi		

QUESTIONS FOR EXAMINERS

1. Are the first questions natural, friendly, easy to understand?

2. Are questions requiring only short answers avoided?

3. Are the topics varied? Is transition from one topic to another natural? Is the examinee given a chance to expand on one topic before another is introduced?

4. Are there too many vague questions? (e.g. "What do you think of the situation in the Congo?")

5. Is the examinee forced to express his opinion about U.S. Government Policy? (e.g. "If you were President, what would you do about Human Rights?") "How did you like the State-of-the-Union Message?")

6. Are the questions appropriate for the ability of the examinee? Is the S-2 asked easy enough questions? Is the S-4 asked hard enough questions? (Consider vocabulary, structure, subject matter.)

7. Is the examinee given the opportunity to talk sufficiently about the past? the future?

8. Is he given the opportunity (or forced, if necessary) to use the present subjunctive (including commands)? the past subjunctive? On the other hand, are there too many subjunctive questions?

On Testing for S-1+ and S-2

Once a foreign language learner gets beyond the S-1 level, he already has a control of vocabulary and structure beyond the possibility of exhaustive testing in 15 minutes. The sampling of his speech must give him every chance to show off what he does control without wasting time on impossibly difficult questions. The examiner without extensive experience in testing above the S-1 level should allow at least twenty minutes for testing someone with the potential for an S-2.

Questions and interpreter situations should be chosen to test both linguistic and functional qualifications. Thus, for example, questions which call only for present tense answers should be subordinated to those which demand control of past, future, duration, indirect discourse, etc. Comprehension must be checked by asking unsimplified questions on conversational topics at normal speed. Vocabulary must be probed without too much time spent on subjects the examinee can't handle.

The topics covered in the "Self-Appraisal Questionnaire" are neither a necessary nor sufficient inventory of what an S-2 must know; they simply indicate the kind of subjects that most S-2's can handle without much trouble, among many others.

The same topic can be presented on several levels, e. g.

Weather

0+/1 What is the weather like today?
1/1+ Tell me about the climate in your part of the country.
1+/2 What is really bad winter weather in your state like? What is a hurricane (or a tornado)? What do people do to prepare for one? Have you ever been in one? (Tell me about it)

Family and Home

0+/1 How many brothers and sisters do you have? How old are they? What do they do?

1/1+ Tell me about the place your family lives in. What rooms does it have? What does it look like outside?

1+/2 Where did you live as a child? Did you have relatives who lived near by? Who? (How often did you see them?) What was your neighborhood like? What used to happen on your birthday?

Job or Profession (e.g., teacher)

0+/1 What kind of work do you do?
What kind of work will you do in (country)?

1/1+ How did you learn to be a teacher? What did you study? What does a teacher do every day?

1+/2 What teaching materials will you use? What do you know about the school system of (country)? What percentage of children go to school? How do you think teaching there will be different from teaching in the United States?

Some appropriate and adequate response is required to get credit for the lower grade; a reasonably full and linguistically accurate response is needed for the upper one.

It is important for the examiner to relate his questions to the examinee's life and interests and to modify the content according to information given in responses. At the 1+/2 level there is no excuse for identical questions from examinee to examinee, which make it very difficult to establish an atmosphere of normal conversation with real communication going on. One is much more likely to get a full response to Question A then to Question B:

A. Tell me about the elementary school you went to.
B. Describe the American educational system.

At the same time the response to Question A is fully as likely to demonstrate fluency, breadth of vocabulary and control of structure. It is also more likely to provide a source for further "individualized" questions.

While every S-2 must be able to talk comfortably and in some detail about his family and home territory (city, town, state), his autobiography, and his occupation (in addition to carrying out routine aspects of his job), he will be limited in his ability to cope with a number of common topics. He should not be expected to have much precise general vocabulary (e.g. parts of a car, cooking utensils, symptoms of illness) nor should he have to wrestle with intellectually demanding problems (e.g. the powers and responsibilities of the U.S. Congress, Human Rights) but he should be able to sustain superficial social conversation for hours, without serious failure of communication.

Examples of the kind of unspecialized practical interpreting situations an S-2 might handle quite well are:

1) Describing to a policeman the circumstances of a purse-snatching and the appearance of the thief.
2) Making arrangements to rent a large hall and to have it set up for a banquet or a press conference or a workshop.
3) Helping someone through an interview or questionnaire for a job or scholarship in the United States.

Many other situations can be devised by examiners familiar with the examinee's occupational specialty and his post of assignment. In any case, interpreting at this level should be reserved for problem solving and not wasted on topics covered more easily in ordinary conversation.

A useful technique at this level, if there are two examiners, is for one of them to give the examinee written instructions in English to convey certain information in the target language to the other examiner. These instructions are usually of two types, definitions and requests. For example:

> Describe a volcano (a ferry boat, a tooth pick) so that Examiner B can identify what you are talking about.
>
> Tell Examiner B: I have left my glasses on the last table on the left in the dining hall and ask him to get them for me right away.

The examinee succeeds if the native speaker is able to give the English word identifying the object described or starts to respond to the request and can explain what he has been asked to do. For this reason the object to be idenfified must be well within the native speaker's English vocabulary and experience, and the written instructions must be unknown to the native speaker in every case. Only items appropriate to the S-2 level must be chosen, if this procedure is to yield useful information.

An S-1+ is to be given to an examinee who can do many of the things an S-2 can do in addition to meeting all the requirements for an S-1 (An S-2, of course, meets the requirements for S-1 also). His failure to earn S-2 is usually because of inadequacy of vocabulary and/or structural control to a) convey accurate information or b) sustain conversation on some S-2 topics. Even high fluency

and broad vocabulary will not earn an S-2 if the grammatical errors are serious; on the other thand, perfect control of the grammar cannot compensate for a vocabulary too limited for many S-2 level topics.

METHODE A SUIVRE

A L'INTENTION DES EXAMINATEURS

L'examen oral de l'FSI n'a pas pour but de faire l'inventaire des connaissances passives du candidat, mais plutôt d'évaluer son degré de communication et la manière dont il s'exprime. Pour déterminer la note que l'on doit donner à un candidat, il importe surtout de mesurer la gamme des situations qui correspondent à son niveau d'expression. On doit considérer comment il utilise ses connaissances ainsi que son habileté à manipuler des périphrases pour formuler ses idées ou éviter les structures qu'il ne maîtrise pas, ainsi que la précision et la facilité avec lesquelles il manie le vocabulaire et la grammaire. Etant donné le caractère non automatique et la flexibilité des tests de l'FSI, ceux-ci possèdent deux caractéristiques absolues:

1) Ils permettent de mesurer la capacité d'expression du candidat dans une situation naturelle.
2) Ils présentent un certain degré d'uniformité quant aux notes et à l'épreuve même, quel que soit l'examinateur et quelle que soit la langue.

On ne doit déterminer la note qu'après avoir fait parler le candidat pendant un certain temps et dans un contexte naturel, en orientant la conversation sur des sujets en rapport avec les conditions de vie et de travail à l'étranger. On peut par exemple créer des situations dans lesquelles le canditat doit soit expliquer à un agent immobilier quelle sorte de maison il voudrait louer, soit interviewer une personne désirant un visa soit encore expliquer la politique américaine dans une situation donnée. D'autre part, toute question sur les connaissances littéraires, historiques ou autres, pas plus que les tests à choix multiple sur la grammaire ou le vocabulaire ne devraient être utilisés en vue de déterminer la note.

Bien qu'on ait toujours accordé aux examinateurs une certaine indépendance pour juger du contenu d'un test, il est essentiel qu'ils se mettent d'accord sur les principes selon lesquels ils jugeront la façon dont s'exprime le candidat et dont dépendra sa note. Aucun examinateur ne devrait exiger de la part d'un candidat des connaissances trop techniques (traduction de poésie, utilisation de termes régionaux, etc...) et ceci surtout dans les langues pour lesquelles il y a plusieurs examinateurs. Vous trouverez ci-dessous une liste de techniques qui peuvent permettre d'obtenir des indications sur la façon de parler du candidat. Nous ne traitons pas ici de la conversation autobiographique qui fait partie de tout test. (Toute suggestion concernant les méthodes sera la bienvenue.)

Prononciation

Ce facteur ne demande pas d'attention spéciale puisqu'il sera mis naturellement en évidence dans la conversation.

Grammaire

Dans la mesure du possible, essayer d'obtenir les indications désirées dans la conversation. Dresser à l'avance une liste des points de grammaire que l'on pourra cocher afin de tenir le compte de ceux qui sont suffisamment ou insuffisamment maîtrisés ainsi que de ceux que l'on n'aura pas encore obtenus dans la conversation. Essayer d'obtenir d'autres constructions grammaticales en faisant jouer un rôle au candidat, (par exemple pour l'impératif, voir s'il peut demander à quelqu'un de réparer quelque chose; pour la forme interrogative, voir s'il est capable de se renseigner sur les moyens de transport, les prix ou les horaires) ou en utilisant une situation d'interprète qui exigera une traduction assez précise.

On ne devrait recourir qu'en dernier ressort aux procédés artificiels consistant à donner des exercices comme ceux que l'on

fait en classe et des thèmes (traduction de l'anglais) hors de contexte. De tels procédés sont à rejeter parce qu'ils manquent de naturel et de spontanéité.

Vocabulaire

Aux niveaux les plus bas (S-2 et au dessous) on peut délimiter l'étendue du vocabulaire pratique et professionnel du candidat en passant délibérément de banalités à une conversation dirigée (comment demander un ticket d'autobus, embaucher une bonne ou décrire les symptômes d'une maladie à un médecin).

Aux niveaux les plus élevés, c'est dans la conversation que l'on peut obtenir le plus facilement le vocabulaire relatif à la profession du candidat alors que pour obtenir le vocabulaire d'ordre général on peut donner des problèmes à résoudre en détail (par exemple, faire faire des transformations dans la cuisine ou décrire des réparations à faire sur une voiture) ou bien faire décrire ou définir des objets connus ou certaines habitudes (par exemple, décrire une chaussure, les règles d'un jeu, la façon de conduire sur la neige ou sur le verglas, ou la façon d'emballer un paquet que l'on va mettre à la poste).

Il est important de se rappeler que beaucoup, sinon la plupart, des gens éduqués ne considèrent pas comme faisant essentiellement partie de leur vocabulaire actif des mots et des expressions qui viendraient naturellement à l'esprit d'une personne spécialisée dans un domaine particulier.

Il faut juger un candidat sur la facilité et l'exactitude avec lesquelles il s'exprime plutôt que sur son habileté à trouver des équivalents aux locutions anglaises. En d'autres termes, à la place du 'mot juste' une périphrase serait acceptable. (Le vocabulaire passif devrait être jugé sur la compréhension).

Débit

Point n'est besoin de procédés spéciaux pour évaluer le débit, mais si un candidat répond facilement à une question du niveau S-2, il faudrait le pousser à répondre à une question du niveau S-3. Il est facile de surestimer le débit quand le candidat ne répond qu'à des questions simples. D'autre part, une réponse lente à une question très difficile, devrait être jugée en tenant compte de la difficulté que cette question présenterait à une personne s'exprimant dans sa langue maternelle. Pour évaluer le débit du candidat, il importe surtout de lui donner l'occasion de répondre assez longuement à plusieurs questions.

Compréhension

Au cours d'un examen de l'FSI, la façon dont on juge la compréhension est souvent ce qu'il y a de moins adéquat. Si l'examinateur n'a pas l'art d'employer une syntaxe compliquée et un vocabulaire peu usuel en formulant ses questions, l'épreuve fondée uniquement sur la conversation pourrait ne pas exiger d'un candidat de niveau S-5 une meilleure compréhension que celle d'un candidat de niveau S-2.

Bien qu'il soit acceptable de faire écouter au candidat des bandes magnétiques sur lesquelles sont enregistrés des nouvelles ou des dialogues radiodiffusés de courte durée, ceci est souvent impossible ou tout au moins difficile en raison du temps limité, ou de l'absence de magnétophone. Il serait peut-être bon de découper au préalable de courts articles de journaux représentant différents niveaux que l'examinateur pourrait lire à voix haute. Il poserait ensuite des questions en anglais ou dans la langue que l'on évalue, questions dont l'objectif principal serait de déterminer la compréhension des passages difficiles. (Les épreuves de mémoire sont à éviter).

Aux niveaux les plus bas, on pourrait donner au candidat des instructions ou des renseignements et juger de sa compréhension en fonction de ses réactions. En fait, quel que soit le niveau, une situation d'interprète appropriée offre le meilleur moyen d'évaluer la compréhension.

Au niveau S-4 et au-dessus, on peut recourir à des proverbes et à des idiotismes que comprennent tous les gens éduqués, (tels que 'les raisins sont trop verts' ou 'à bon entendeur salut'). Mais quel que soit le niveau du candidat, il ne faut pas baser sa décision sur le fait qu'il connaisse un certain proverbe, idiotisme ou vocable. Les expressions régionales, les tournures populaires désuètes ou les mots peu usités sont à éviter.

Il pourrait être utile de recourir de temps en temps, sans en abuser, à de brusques changements de sujet de conversation pour vérifier la compréhension hors de contexte.

Mais il vaudrait sans doute mieux ne pas recourir à ce moyen plus de deux ou trois fois au cours d'une épreuve si on ne veut pas courir le risque de donner l'impression d'incohérence.

Grammatical Benchmarks for French

In formal programs of instruction grammatical features tend to be mastered in the order shown below. For some people these groups of structures indicate the degree of control of the language.

These criteria are especially important in end-of-training tests, where the examinee is unlikely to have compensatory skills to make up for grammatical weaknesses. If a speaker with practical experience using French abroad has high fluency, broad vocabulary, and unusually good comprehension, some lack of grammatical control is allowed, but most features required for each level must be mastered.

Essential for Communication

Present tense: avoir, être, aller, and regular verbs
Future expressed by aller + infinitive
Passé composé understood but not in use
Past concept conveyed somehow (usually by adverbs)
Yes-no questions and questions with question words
Negative statements and questions with present tense
De/à + definite article (general knowledge)
Demonstratives
Gender concept

Important for Communication

All verbs: present, passé composé, imperfect, imperative
Distinction between passé composé and imperfect (understood)
Regular verbs: future

Direct and indirect object pronouns, y and en: correctly selected and placed but not necessarily in order when co-occurring

Use of qui and que (F)

Prepositions, especially á and de (F)

Possessive adjectives (G)

Definite vs indefinite article

Chez

Necessary for More Precise Communication

All spoken tenses of all verbs: forms and usage

Concordance of tenses

Passé composé vs imperfect (Mastered)

Tu forms

All relative, demonstrative, possessive, interrogative pronouns:

All object pronouns, y, en in co-occurrence

Negative pronouns and adverbs in co-occurrence

Agreement of gender and number: adjectives, past participle

Prepositions

Tout, tous, etc.

C'est vs il est

Guía para los Examinadores sobre el Modo de Proceder al Tomar el Examen Oral del FSI

Las escalas del FSI de uno a cinco no son una medida de lo que el examinando sabe en un sentido pasivo acerca de un idioma extranjero, sino más bien son un indicio de su habilidad en el uso de él, o, podríamos decir, la medida de cuánto puede decir en otro idioma y de cómo lo emplea.

El criterio más importante para determinar el nivel de proficienca es el grado de habilidad con que el examinando puede expresarse en las distintas circunstancias a que se le lleva y la capacidad que demuestra del uso del idioma.

Se le debe reconocer la forma de valerse de todos sus conocimientos, ie, la habilidad con que vence obstáculos por medio de circumloquios, la evasión de elementos gramaticales no controlados, así como cualquier dominio de gramática y vocabulario que sea evidente.

Un examen oral como el del FSI, caracterizado por la flexibilidad de su contenido y la más completa objetividad en la aplicación de normas de proficiencia bien definidas, tiene dos características primordiales:

1) Validez del Contenido: o sea, la medida de la habilidad de conversacion se basa en una demostración real.
2) Formato Standard para todos los examinadores.

La facilidad en el hablar debe ser calificada sobre la base de una conversación bastante amplia y natural sin que se introduzcan elementos forzados que no tengan que ver con la vida o el trabajo del individuo en el servicio exterior. Así que, por ejemplo, la técnica o el recurso de asignar papeles para que el individuo actúe

de acuerdo con las realidades del servicio diplomático, o del Cuerpo de Paz, es un modo muy eficaz de sacarle al examinando ciertos informes necesarios para llegar a un juicio bien fundado. Unos ejemplos prácticos de esto serían las siguientes situaciones típicas de un sinnúmero de posibilidades: el examinando le describe a un corredor de bienes raíces la clase de casa que busca para alquilar; un vice-cónsul puede entrevistar a quien le solicite una visa para ir a trabajar a los EE.UU.; un voluntario entrevista a un campesino a quien quiere ayudar de alguna manera relacionada con su trabajo; un funcionario de la USIS explica el punto de vista de su gobierno sobre el control de la natalidad o los derechos humanos o la extensión del mar territorial, etc. En cambio, preguntas sobre temas literarios tendientes a comprobar conocimientos en ese campo especializado, o las pruebas escritas sobre la gramática o modismos, por ejemplo, son de muy escaso valor en un examen que pretende medir la facilidad en el uso del idioma hablado.

Aunque se les haya permitido a los examinadores cierta libertad de juicio sobre el contenido del examen oral, es imprescindible que se pongan de acuerdo en lo referente a los elementos básicos que sirven de fondo para poder establecer el nivel de proficiencia según las escalas del FSI. Es preciso que se definan y que se mantengan estas normas para que los resultados sean uniformes entre todos los examinadores. Hay que hacer un esfuerzo especial para que ningún examinador sea conocido por sus exigencias en materia de regionalismos, traducción de poesía, vocabulario técnico, o cosas por el estilo. A continuación hay algunas surgerencias mediante las cuales es posible sacar más datos de los que se suelen captar durante la conversación personal. Esta, sin embargo, debe formar parte de todo examen oral.

Pronunciación

Aquí no hay problema ya que todas las impresiones necesarias se reciben durante la conversación personal con la cual se empieza el examen.

Gramática

Se debe tratar de sacar todos los datos posibles durante la conversación. Con el fin de acordarse bien del control o la falta de control de todos los elementos gramaticales como los pronombres, los verbos reflexivos, los tiempos de los verbos, la concordancia de persona, de número y de género, los mandatos directos, Por y Para, Ser y Estar, el subjuntivo, etc., se puede emplear una especie de 'checklist' u hoja de calificación como la que se adjunta.

Una vez terminada la conversación, si le quedan dudas sobre el control de cualquier elemento gramatical, lo podría sacar a la luz por medio de una de esas 'situaciones' ya citadas en las cuales el examinando desempeña un papel imaginario (verbigracia, compruebe las formas interrogativas pidiendo informes sobre el costo u otros detalles de transporte o alojamiento; compruebe el control de los mandatos directos pidiéndole que haga componer algo como el calzado, la ropa, el automóvil, etc., o se le puede pedir que le sirva de intérprete exigiéndole que traduzca con precisión lo que Ud. diga en inglés en esta situación imaginaria).

Lo que sí se debiera evitar es el empleo de ejercicios que se suelen usar en clase. Además, no se consideran apropiadas las traducciones al vuelo de frases en inglés por ser éstas demasiado forzadas o faltas de naturalidad.

Vocabulario

En los niveles más bajos de las escalas del FSI (S-2 para abajo) los límites del vocabulario de la persona examinada en lo rutinario y lo práctico se pueden averiguar fácilmente pasando más allá de la conversación general sobre temas que le son muy conocidos a proyectos concretos como, por ejemplo, comprar un boleto de autobús, contratar a una cocinera, describirle al médico los síntomas de una enfermedad, etc.

En cambio, en los niveles más altos el vocabulario profesional puede revelarse más fácilmente en una conversación bien dirigida y canalizada por el examinador; el vocabulario general se manifiesta más claramente utilizando el proceso de resolver problemas tales como la remodelación de una cocina, por ejemplo, la descripción de cómo se emplea un teléfono automático o una máquina de coser, o de cómo se juega tenis o de cómo se maneja un auto en el norte de los EE.UU. en invierno cuando hay nieve en las carreteras, o cómo se envuelve un paquete para mandarlo por correo, o se le puede pedir que describa cómo se distingue el calzado masculino del que usan las mujeres. Existe un sinnúmero de posibilidades sacadas de la experiencia de todos los días.

Es importante recordar que hasta la gente culta de habla española, que sirve de base de comparación como representante de la escala más elevada (S-5), no siendo especialista en linguística, muchas veces desconoce términos comunes en ese ramo. Por lo tanto, no se les debe pedir a los examinandos los equivalentes de expresiones que sólo los especialistas podrían saber. Nos interesa más el efecto total de lo que dice la persona que se examina, que el uso de frases sueltas traducidas del inglés al castellano. Además, se puede decir que el circumloquio, o la facilidad para traducir conceptos usando varias palabras comunes

que expresen claramente la idea, tiene tanto valor como el empleo de algunas palabras rebuscadas.

Fluidez

No se necesitan procedimientos especiales para medir la fluidez, pero hay que tener presente cierta tendencia a sobreëstimar la fluidez cuando se trata de preguntas fáciles de contestar. Es decir que una pregunta sobre un tema muy conocido puede contestarse con relativa facilidad y viceversa. Uno no se debe dejar impresionar demasiado pronto por respuestas cortas y rápidas a preguntas rutinarias.

Lo principal es que la fluidez se debe medir solamente después de haberle dado al examinando la oportunidad de contestar a varias preguntas detenidamente.

Comprensión

Se debe poner más atención a este aspecto del examen para que el resultado refleje con más exactitud los diversos niveles entre la comprensión parcial y completa en las reacciones y respuestas hechas en conversación variada a velocidad normal. Es fácil dejarse engañar en un examen que consiste exclusivamente en una conversación a menos que el que conduzca la conversación tenga cierta experiencia en el arte de hacer preguntas de una sintaxis un tanto más complicada y de un vocabulario más extenso del que se emplea con alguien de proficiencia limitada. Hay que exigirles más a los más avanzados en lo tocante a la comprensión como en todos los demás aspectos del idioma.

En los niveles más bajos se le puede dar al examinando una serie de instrucciones o informes para que actúe o responda, por ejemplo, "Si yo le digo que cierre la puerta, Qué quiero que haga Ud. ," etc. O se le puede describir algo que pasó el día anterior (real o ficticio) para ver si lo entiende. Sin embargo, en todos los niveles la manera más segura de comprobar la comprensión reside en el artificio de hacerle servir de intérprete. Claro que esto debe prepararse con mucho cuidado.

Ciertos refranes y modismos que se entienden en todas partes del mundo hispánico entre la gente culta como, por ejemplo, "Más vale maña que fuerza," "Al país que fueres, haz lo que vieres," "No hay mal que por bien no venga," etc., son elementos admisibles en el examen, pero la falta de conocimiento de algún refrán o modismo no debe nunca ser un factor determinante en el puntaje final. Además, se deberían evitar siempre los regionalismos, barbarismos y palabras raras o arcaicas.

El empleo de vez en cuando de un cambio de tema abrupto sin previo aviso puede ser provechoso siempre que no se llegue al punto de parecer incoherente.

Grammatical Benchmarks for Spanish

A. Essential to Meaning

1. Appropriate use of parts of speech
2. Indication of time
3. Indication of subjects and objects (including person, number, and inanimate gender)
4. Question vs statement vs command

B. Important to Meaning

1. Possessives
2. Single object pronouns
3. Number and persons in verb endings
4. Present vs past vs future
5. Conditional
6. Some prepositions (high frequency)

C. Helpful to Meaning

1. Reflexives
2. Ser vs estar
3. Preterite vs imperfect vs perfect
4. Present subjunctive
5. Some prepositions (e.g. prep. conj.)

X. Essential to Acceptability

1. Gender in high-frequency nouns

Y. Important to Acceptability

1. Conjugations and irregular verb forms
2. Familiar vs formal address
3. Gender in lower frequency nouns
4. Gender and number agreement in adjectives
5. Adjective placement

Z. Helpful to Acceptability

1. Double object pronouns
2. Past subjunctive
3. Future and conditional of conjecture

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE TAPES

The tapes are selected recordings of actual tests. They are examples from the central part of each test. Greetings, introductions and farewells are omitted since they usually occur outside of the testing room and consequently outside of recording time. Names of candidates and other identifying information have been removed from the tapes. The opinions voiced on the tapes are, of course, those of the examinees and not necessarily those of their employer. The content of the conversations is important only to the extent that it shows how well the examinee is understanding when spoken to and understood when speaking. Each conversation should be considered first of all as an attempt to communicate within the limits of imperfect linguistic ability and under the strain of an examination. Background noises do exist on the tapes. Occasionally a typewriter or a passing airplane can be heard. The recordings were made in an office, not in a studio. They are realistic examples of tests as described in the narrative section of this manual.

FRENCH KIT

Test #A- S-0+
(Female candidate)

The examinee comprehends basic questions with extreme difficulty or not at all. Most questions have to be rephrased or simplified.

The interviewer attempts to engage in conversation on topics such as time, weather and numbers. The answers are mainly in monosyllables. Examinee uses some simple sentences with the verbs: être, avoir, and aller. She uses the present tense regardless of the context. Her speech is hesitant and slow.

Test #B- S-1
(Male candidate)

Examinee is able to talk about his work in a very limited fashion. He understands many simple questions. He is able to use a few verbs in addition to être, avoir and aller, but he does not do so consistently. His speech is limited to the present tense regardless of context although he did use the past tense once. He attempts more complicated structure but cannot handle it. e.g. 'nous pensons allons.' He cannot handle the expressions for years, and his pronunciation makes his rendition of numbers doubtful: e.g./2/vs./12/(?)/ /3/vs/13/(?)/. His speech is very slow, and many sentences are not finished.

One amusing touch due to the wrong use of the possessive adjective is:

'...quelque chose de spécial? Oui, ma fille aîneé est là avec votre mari...'
(Note interviewer's reaction!)

FRENCH KIT

Test #C- S-1
(Male candidate)

Able to meet travel needs. Understands most questions if asked slowly or repeated. Guesses tenses of the questions by context and sometimes misses (ex.: the trip to Houston) Present tense is adequate, but there are some errors. His use of the past tense is erratic: correctly used once, 'je suis allé...'; once with wrong auxilliary + wrong past participle ('je suis étudie') and usually omitted.

Handles time and numbers with great difficulty. Slow speech. Makes an effort to pronounce clearly.

Test #D- S-1+
(Male candidate)

Communication is at normal speed. No hesitations between questions and answers.

Able to discuss his work in spite of poor grammar.

He has some good technical vocabulary, but he resorts to English words once in a while. He uses the past tense, but not consistently and sometimes with the wrong auxilliary.

He sometimes omits the verb of the sentence. He is occasionally unable to finish his sentences (e.g. his trip paid by Pan Am).

He did not understand some questions. His pronunciation is not clear.

FRENCH KIT

Test #E- S-1+
(Male candidate)

Examinee describes his work with appropriate vocabulary.

Makes up for hesitancy by producing complete sentences; his lively intonation compensates for the obvious effort in pronunciation.

Conversation is at normal speed with some misunderstandings due to non-recognition of helping verbs. Verb endings are not clear. Able to carry on social conversation outside of work and survival contexts.

Test #F- S-2
(Male candidate)

Comprehension good outside of one idiom. Some complex constructions with use of more than one or two verbs. Sometimes the wrong relative pronouns are used.

Cannot use the passive voice. Passé-composé good with an occasional slip. Difficulties with irregular verbs such as vouloir.

Good communication. Good description of his work.

FRENCH KIT

Test #G- S-2
(Female candidate)

Good variety of subjects. Fluency good. Communication good with some exception due to misuse of verbs. Sometimes answers in the present instead of the past. Usually uses the passé composé well but rarely uses the imperfect and omits the future. Occasionally uses the present tense where the imperfect or the future is required.

There are some problems with pronunciation: Ankara = *Akra and nordique = *nautique

In spite of good fluency, the examinee cannot be rated S-2+ because of limitations of grammar.

Test #H- S-2+
(Male candidate)

Accent good. Able to discuss a good range of subjects, lacking only technical vocabulary. The listener sometimes has to make an effort to follow the examinee's explanations.

There are some anglicisms. He is better than S-2 because he rarely misunderstands and because he is able to give more details. Not an S-3 because he uses passé-composé for imperfect. He completely omits the subjunctive and the conditional.

FRENCH KIT

Test #I- S-2+
(Male candidate)

Makes up for his slow speech with good grammar. He is limited but careful about his pronunciation, verbs and especially prepositions. Comprehension limited but communication is usually re-established after an initial misinterpretation.

Examinee is easy to understand. Some good constructions well above level S-2: e.g. 'Je vais préparer des projets pour aider la Mauritanie à subvenir aux besoins de sa population.' good vocabulary: 'le terrain,' 'les rochers,' 'les sources d'eau,' 'le sol.'

Is able to correct himself.

Test #J- S-3
(Female candidate)

Examinee participates effectively in conversation concerning her work as well as other matters. Able to exchange ideas with interviewer. Good use of tenses. passé-composé, imparfait plus-que-parfait are handled well.

Evidence of subjunctive but obvious reluctance tc use conditional which she avoids without hindering communication. (Note team work of interviewer and examiner trying repeatedly to extract a 'si' clause)

FRENCH KIT

Test #K- S-3
(Male candidate)

Easy relaxed conversation. Examinee even attempts a pun or two. Good description of work. Mistakes do not interfere with communication. For instance. 'De temps *à temps il faut jusqu'à 3 mois ou 4 mois pour *récompenser totalement le changement *qui c'est passé il y a 6 mois.' Uses some complex structures. Good concordance of tenses, but the conditional is not completely under control.

Some angliscisms: *pas aussi beaucoup comme
Short of technical vocabulary. Passive voice not under control.

Test #L- S-3+
(Male candidate)

The examinee is fluent. There are occasional mistakes in prepositions, verb endings and gender.

Uses colloquial French; note the "euh" to mark hesitation, sounds like a native. Able to express himself easily on a wide range of topics.

Verb tenses good, but there are occasional mistakes such as
*si je voudrais.
*je savais bien que c'est...
*j'ai dit toujours que...

FRENCH KIT

Test #M- S-3+
(Male candidate)

Excellent fluency. Good intonation. There are errors, however, in these areas: object pronouns, prepositions, choice of words based on English.

Discusses wide range of topics with great ease; also well able to defend his opinion in a pleasant manner and style, broad vocabulary and many colloquial expressions.

Test #N- S-4
(Male candidate)

Examinee expresses himself with a certain elegance. Has typically French structures which flow naturally. Has a good choice of vocabulary. Good accent.

One consistent failure is the passive voice

ex: Jaurès *était battu eu 98 (instead of a été)
En 98, il *était battu (instead of avait été)
les documents *étaient détruits (ont été)

Some errors of prepositions:

ex: Je m'intéresse *des élections de 1902.

One or two tenses wrong:

ex: Il y avait des gens qui *ont voulu même le tuer.

FRENCH KIT

Test #O- S-4
(Male candidate)

Examinee talks fluently on both familiar and completely unexpected subjects. He is willing to discuss anything. Stumbles once in awhile but usually finds the right construction. Very good choice of words.

ex. remous, acharné, des vents qui déblaient, souches

Good use of verb tenses with the exception of the passive voice:

ex. *j'étais très frappé (j'ai été)
*c'était écrit (il a été écrit)
*ce n'était pas traduit (Ça n'a pas été)

Two accidental lapses in use of imparfait instead of passé-composé or plus-que-parfait

ex. un voyage qui *durait 3 semaines (a duré)
il y *avait beaucoup de vie humaine
pendant des années (il y avait eu)

Examples of some beautiful sentences:

'Ils font des recommandations à partir des pressions qui s'exercent sur eux'
il le faut
l'arabe est nettement plus difficile
avant que ce soit ouvert au public

S-Ratings in Spanish: Criteria and Characteristics

The descriptions below characterize the speaking proficiency found at each level, with special comment on the strengths and weaknesses especially typical of the Peace Corps Volunteer normally receiving that grade.

S-5 Speaks the language natively, with the ability to use and understand spanish as accurately, easily, and precisely as a graduate of a Latin American University. There are no non-native features in his speech observable to the educated Latin Listener.

PCV's with S-5 ratings have no particular linguistic characteristics to distinguish them from other S-5's.

S-4 and S-4+. Speaks the language with almost complete fluency, exactness, and breadth of vocabulary. Although he usually lacks the easy command of idioms, slang, proverbial expressions, etc. normally obtainable only through childhood residence and education in a Spanish-speaking country, he knows and uses the language well enough to become a competent Spanish teacher, an official government interpreter, or a businessman who could deal efficiently (from a linguistic point of view) with anyone from the President of the country to the village leaders. Like the S-5, his speech approximates that of the <u>educated</u> native speaker (but with occasional random non-native mistakes).

PCV's with S-4 and S-4+ ratings are no different from other S-4's; they differ from other PCV's in their awareness and control of vocabulary and structure, which will enable them to follow a number of professional and academic pursuits closed to less competent speakers.

S-3 and S-3+. Speaks the language fluently and accurately enough to be comfortable to listen to and easy to understand. Can comprehend complex discourse and follow conversations between native speakers, and has sufficient vocabulary to describe his work in detail and participate effectively in professional discussions. Controls most of the basic grammatical features of the language (e.g. verb tenses, ser-estar contrast, object pronouns, noun-adjective agreement, subjunctive), and compensates to some extent for those he does not control by paraphrase, circumlocution, and precision of vocabulary. A gap in control of any one basic grammatical feature does not by itself preclude an S-3 or S-3+, but a sufficient combination of systematic errors must limit the examinee to a lower grade. "Minimum professional proficiency" promises the end-user, be he university dean, Government personnel officer, or businessman-employer, the linguistic ability to deal effectively with government or professional counterparts. It is considered a high level of competence and is the basis for employee incentive payments in several Government agencies.

PCV's in this range generally have greater fluency and a broader vocabulary but much less control of structure than S-3's and S-3+'s who have been through longer formal training. They do, however, speak Spanish accurately enough to be immediately useful in jobs at all social and educational levels.

S-2 and S-2+. Can usually communicate uncomplicated ideas and experiences without difficulty and can meet routine job demands. Limitations of vocabulary, structural control, and aural comprehension restrict his usefulness to a narrow field of experience and prevent confidence in his ability to perform adequately in different linguistic environments.

PCV's at this level are noted for their good pronunciation and fluency, their frequent inability to follow educated discourse, their general lack of grammatical control, and many gaps in vocabulary. Characteristic features of their speech include purely English syntax and a trailing of sentences, with the listener required to supply mentally the words omitted. Their effectiveness in Spanish over it tends to depend on their personalities rather than their command of the language--a psychological factor FSI is not equipped to measure.

S-1 and S-1+. Can survive among Spanish monolinguals but is very difficult to talk to and understand because of his almost total unawareness of the structure of the language, his extremely limited vocabulary, and his poor comprehension and pronunciation. If he communicates effectively, he does so by actions and gestures rather than by words.

PCV's are like other speakers at this level, although they may wield their handful of words with greater ease and less precision than most.

SPANISH KIT

Test #A- S-0+
(Male candidate)

Having been in Spain for a time, examinee's comprehension is strong point. Obviously there is no grammar control present. Vocabulary is insufficient for even simplest conversation. Oral production is limited to vague utterances and halting attempts at answering. Simple hotel room reservation situation helps confirm whether person is at all functional in language or not.

Test #B- S-1
(Male candidate)

Able to answer simple, direct questions. Appears not able to handle compound sentences yet. Typically, exhibits frequent gender confusion. Vocabulary is limited, though comprehension in straightforward conversation is good. In order to overccme vocabulary deficiencies, he fabricates words resulting in a loss of communication. Able to communicate autobiographical data.

Test #C- S-1
(Male candidate)

Although limited, comprehension is the strong point of this examinee. He has little or no control of grammar in spite of occasional knowledge of some past tense forms. He draws on his knowledge of other languages to reconstruct vocabulary with which he is unfamiliar, and this results in confusion. Can communicate some autobiographical data and could probably handle a survival situation.

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Test #D- S-1+
(Female candidate)

Although grammar is weak, candidate talks readily and more often than not, projects understandable communication. Again, comprehension is strongest point. Pronunciation is generally good and does not interfere with understanding her. At times some structures are "pidgin" such as productos maderas (for productos de madera) and Yo creo que el Secretario esperar que los precios vienen bajo. She's better than "survivalship," but does not have the consistency nor the facility usually associated with the S-2 level.

Test #E- S-1+
(Male candidate)

Impressive vocabulary, fair pronunciation, but weak grammar and comprehension. He has learned to respond quickly to questions, and unless one is attentive one will not realize that some of these quick responses do not relate to the question at all. (Example: Y, además de Ankara, ¿qué otros lugares visitó? His answer: SÍ, Ankara es una ciudad muy antigua.) Notice frequent use of either English or heavily Anglicized forms. He is better than mere survivalship, but has at times a very difficult time understanding some of the relatively simple questions. This would indicate that he is not yet able to handle many of the more ordinary situations though he is able to handle some of them well.

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Test #F- S-2
(Male candidate)

Impressive fluency. In general can understand or at least get the gist of most conversation on non-technical subjects. Displays knowledge of tenses and can handle elementary constructions although control is neither thorough nor confident. Frequently says things he does not mean to say. Vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension much more developed than that of an S-1+.

Test #G- S-2
(Male candidate)

Opening of interview is deceptive; one gets the initial impression of a much higher proficiency. As conversation progresses, vocabulary voids appear leading to an inability to understand and to respond at times. (Example: candidate was thrown off by the relatively straight-forward question, ¿Le fue fácil adaptarse a la vida aquí? Yet he exhibits good fluency and resourcefulness (as in defining *pumpas: son máquinas para elevar el petróleo.) Can maintain conversation going at a good rate. Errors are too frequent though, and at times he is incomprehensible; therefore, he is rated S-2 instead of S-2+ or S-3 which are usually thought of as levels requiring general reliability in communication.

Sample errors:

*la ley 'degree'	*servicio extraño
*es necesito	*pumpas (bombas)
*mi tanta	*muy complazando

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Test #H- S-2+
(Male candidate)

An interesting though long interview. Candidate shows good ability to keep conversation going, and can talk on a variety of topics. Vocabulary range appears to be extensive. He is not yet fluent, but he uses or at least appears to be aware of all tenses; he does not control grammar well; the latter appears to be his weakest point. However, most verbs are well organized even though a few times he makes some painfully erroneous classifications: *acceptido for aceptado for example, and aprendió for aprendí.

Difficult case to judge because he appears to fall in the grey area between the upper range of S-2 (S-2+) and the lower range of S-2+ (S-2++). However, once he gets off the travel subject and into more recent experiences, his fluency and accuracy pick up, and he is clearly a 2+. One should note that during the entire interview his reliability in understanding and responding is commendable.

Sample errors:
aprendió for aprendí
está for es
un tarjeta
eses casas
*acceptido for aceptado

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Test #I- S-2+
(Male candidate)

Candidate exhibits a good variety of vocabulary and is thus able to handle a variety of topics. His fluency is fairly good, and he can easily keep a conversation going at a reasonably normal pace. His errors are frequent, but they do not interfere much with comprehensibility. His comprehension is high, and his reliability in understanding and in responding is good. He has fairly good control of present and the two past tenses, and we can assume that he may have other tenses (including some subjunctives) in his repertoire. It is not essential to have subjunctives at this level, though it is always reassuring to hear a few of them.

Sample errors:
lado for largo
tormentos for tormentas
no soy en la sección
cuatros for cuadras
*humididad
*vejículo

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Test #J- S-3
(Male candidate)

(Previous study in High School and College has paid off beautifully; after training at FSI, his grammatical repertoire and accuracy have climbed from an S-1+ into the S-3+ range: a commendable climb.)

Exhibits broad range of vocabulary, appears to be able to converse on almost any topic, has good though not high fluency, and has good control of grammar and verb tenses. Errors are not abrasive and not too frequent. Halting, cautious delivery and frequent repeating or auto-correction keep him from being considered at S-3+ level.

Sample errors:
He tenido cuatro años en la escuela....
este escuela
educación liberal
*absorbar
(hesitation w/gender of conocimiento)

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Test #K- S-3
(Female candidate)

Exhibits good fluency, appears to have a broad vocabulary range, uses all tenses, and has good verb control. Can maintain a conversation going on apparently any subject. Comprehension is good but still not developed enough to pick up long, complicated questions. Halting, cautious delivery, at times almost insecure, especially during the latter part of the interview. This projection of insecurity keeps her from being considered at S-3+ level.

Sample errors:
los escuelas
un de los asuntos
muchas representantes
*responsibilidad
vendas (for ventas)
dos terceros
revuelto

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Test #L- S-3+
(Male candidate)

Able to handle apparently any situation in the language. He has a broad vocabulary, a high level of comprehension, and a very good control of grammar. He may well be able to function as successfully as an S-4, but there is a demonstrated absence here and there of a common vocabulary item (tenedor de libros, empleo for empleado) which makes us suspect that his Spanish is either "rusty" at this moment or that he really is not an S-4. This, plus a scattering of errors make him an S-3+. Grammatical accuracy and near complete, if not complete, vocabulary are essential at the S-4 level.

Sample errors:
ir en Africa
(hesitation with negociaron)
no podían evitar que...salieron
no es que me aburro....
por esto for por eso

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Test #M- S-3+
(Male candidate)

A good example of a person who has complete confidence in his ability to perform easily and with success within the language due to an extended period of isolation and involvement with the language. He sounds very much like an S-4 (freedom of fluency and comprehension, very broad vocabulary) and indeed may function as reliably as an S-4. However, there is an accumulation of errors some of which are not heard at the S-4 level, such as una *pedida, un otro país *crudos. This fact combined with a few misses with the subjunctive, assigns him to the S-3+ level.

(Notice how effective a situation is in drawing a candidate into his normal speech patterns and how effective such situations are in displaying subjunctive consistency or inconsistency. This situation was used at the close of the interview in a final attempt to reach an opinion on his control of subjunctives.)

Sample errors:
una *pedida (for pedido)
los costumbres
(Imperfect for preterite: trabajaba for trabajé;
preterite for imperfect: recibimos for recibíamos)
iba para un otro país
*crudos (for 'crude')
quiero que la puerta se abre
quisiera que viene el carpintero
está bien que queda así
a principio
unos cuatro pulgadas

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Test #N- S-4
(Male candidate)

At this level, errors are few and moreover, are not offensive nor detracting. This candidate exhibits long years of association with Spanish having even assimilated his pronunciation at times to that of native, coastal speech (i.e., aspirated /s/, etc.) He is obviously not a native, but he is obviously able to handle any situation competently: notice how well he handles the delicate and unnerving question concerning the President's program on Human Rights.

Sample errors:
este for esto (only once)
en cuanto los términos...(for en cuanto a)
no se puede dar todos...(for dar a todos)

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Test #O- S-4
(Male candiate)

Speaks language with almost complete fluency, exactness, and breadth of vocabulary. Again errors are few and not detracting. Is assigned S-4 rather than S-4+ because of occasional errors in past subjunctive. Notice that some of the "errors" listed below in parentheses may be injected into a conversation even by a native speaker.

Sample errors:
soy nacido en
parientes (for padres)
(están contentos en la embajada que hay personas...)
(no es que hacen falta)
(han surgido problemas no solamente en costa Rica pero problemas en el mercado....)
(una grande catástrofe)

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Test #P- S-4+
(Male candidate)

The difference between S-4 and S-4+ is more impressionistic than that between any other two levels; there are no easy measuring devices to help us gauge the difference. Both are equally competent; one just seems to "sound" closer to a native than the other.

This candidate is not an S-5 because he commits some non-native type errors. (Some errors that may occasionally occur in native speech are in parentheses.) Some errors are always admissible at the S-4 and 4+ levels; otherwise, the candidate would be an S-5.

The accent displayed by the candidate, as well as the account itself, reveals that he has assimilated to porteño Spanish. In this major dialect, as well as in a few other areas of Latin America, present subjunctive is often used where we would expect past subjunctive.

Sample errors:
cinco años y media
un sucursal
lo digo de broma
toda Argentina es sujeto a servir
(salir en huelga)
(le gustaría que esté)
(han habido)

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Test #Q- S-4+
(Male candidate)

This candidate has a native control of phonology, but he is not a native. He makes some mistakes which are not within native norms. (Again, the following list shows non-native errors outside of parentheses.)

Sample errors:
viajé todos los países (for por todos...)
(lo aumentaron) (for lo ascendieron)
representa 1/2 millón de dólares al gobierno (for para el gobierno or le representa...)
(con aquellos dos por ciento)
teníamos que sentar...(sentarnos)
(en años atrás)

SUGGESTIONS FOR SELECTION OF READING MATERIALS FOR TESTS

R-1 a) Make up a list of common public signs containing twenty items or so of the following type:

EXIT	NO PARKING
PUSH	RESTAURANT
STOP	BUS STOP
POST OFFICE	MADISON AVE.
REGISTERED MAIL	1942 32nd St., N.W.
EXCHANGE	GENTLEMEN
	etc.

b) Find in an elementary text-book (or write your own) passages designed for the beginning adult student. The vocabulary should consist only of very high-frequency items and cognates (if appropriate) and the structures should be limited to those learned by most students in the first 100-200 hours of training (excluding pronunciation drill time). Topics should be familiar and plausible. Some that have been found useful are: the geography of a region; the basic structure of government of a country; a description of routine behavior. If you write your own R-1 readings, try to avoid making them fit the content of FSI text material better than any other. If you can't, it may be fairer to count such a selection as R-1 for FSI students and R-1+ for others.

R-2 Look for selections in newspapers written for the semi-educated (if such papers exist), in schoolbooks used in the equivalent of the 8th and 9th grades and in LIFE-like magazines. Avoid structures considered difficult for the English-speaker and try to exclude technical or low-frequency vocabulary items. (If a passage is appropriate except for two or three words, either substitute more common words or warn the student that there are two or three words he is

not expected to know. If he gets stuck on these words, give him the English for them.) R-2 material should not be written especially for English-speakers, but may be sparingly edited to make it simpler. You may find good readings among the short items: jokes, announcements of coming events, letters to the editor, anecdotes, stories about people, etc.

It is usually easier to find R-2+ readings than R-2 readings. If you can decide which specific features make a passage an R-2+ rather than an R-2, you may find it better to determine an R-2 grade by default. (In such a case, however, be sure that the candidate is clearly better than an R-1+.)

R-3 By definition an R-3 can read the newspapers; he will be expected to do so. If the written language is very remote from the spoken language, it may take a long time to become an R-3, but the functional skill involved must not be ignored. In some languages, if you can read a newspaper, you can read anything "pertinent to professional needs," i.e., R-3 and R-4 seem to fall together. Under such circumstances the differences between the two lie chiefly in extensiveness of vocabulary and insight into rare structures.

An R-3 should, at the very least, be able to grasp the essentials of any article that the literate native speaker understands with a quick skimming. With the aid of a dictionary he should be able to decipher any sentence of a common syntactical pattern.

If readings are selected in accordance with the amplified definition of an R-3, his need for a dictionary should not

be more than occasional (perhaps two or three words out of a hundred in an average news dispatch). Where the article is not in his special area of interest, an officer should be allowed more grace on vocabulary (e.g., a consular officer can be expected to know only the most common military terms, while a military officer is reciprocally ignorant).

R-4 An R-4 is expected to be able to decipher anything that comes his way professionally — a legislative bill, a diplomatic note, a scholarly treatise, etc. If his native counterpart can grasp a selection accurately with one careful reading, it is reasonable to expect the R-4 to do the same. He should have no difficulty with any but the most obscure syntax, and his vocabulary is limited only in non-professional areas; he will, of course, not know all pertinent technical words, but he should recognize all the professionally-relevant vocabulary known to the educated non-professional native.

At this level the testing problem is often that of judging the reading skill of those without sufficient educational background or experience to decode an R-4 reading. Articles selected should be sufficiently unspecialized to be useful to several different types of employees. On the whole it seems wise to stick to the definitions and be strict, although some employees are not R-4 even in English.

It is hazardous to give an R-4 on the basis of one selection at that level.

R-5 The only restrictions on an R-5 reading are that it be reasonably well written prose intelligible to any university graduate.

Effort should be made to find passages containing unusual and complex syntactical patterns and literary, colloquial, and household vocabulary of the kind known to every native speaker ..t to few foreigners.

No single reading is hard enough to warrant assignment of an R-5. Satisfactory translation of two readings at the R-5 level on quite different topics is necessary; successful translation of only one yields an R-4+.